

Distinguished Councilmembers,,

We are a group of dedicated bedside nurses and employees at Denver Health, caring for patients battling coronavirus all while we continue providing the essential care that our community relies on our hospital for. We want to thank you in advance for approving desperately needed emergency funds and, at the same time, rightfully questioning the allocation of money inside of our organization. Your commitment to ensuring the fair and ethical distribution of resources is reassuring to us at a time when we are being forced to reanalyze and reevaluate assumptions we have taken for granted. We share your concerns - concerns we didn't think we would ever have after some of us left for-profit healthcare jobs in favor of non-profit.

We have been diligently working with the understanding that, from top to bottom, this hospital was a team working in service of a shared mission. When our administration asked the frontlines to make cuts and sacrifices we assumed those cuts would be shared across the organization; we were reluctant to ask questions, assuming these requests were being made in good faith. When the same hospital executives who asked us to sacrifice took over a million dollars in bonuses we felt betrayed and demoralized by our leadership, as our concerns for patient safety and our rights as workers were repeatedly dismissed. We have begun to feel ever more expendable as covid-19 lingers, claiming more lives. We are concerned not only for the outcomes of our patients, but for the first time we are concerned for our own safety. As you know, many of us are distancing ourselves from loved ones and have not seen our families for over a month, knowing that when we come home from saving the lives of our patients, we may risk the lives of our families with a substantial viral load covering our clothes, face, and hair.

We know we are in danger. The fear of contracting this illness or giving it to loved ones keeps us up at night and puts our dedication and altruism to the test. In nursing school we were taught to always assess the scene to ensure our own safety before caring for others. We were taught that the safety of others would never be expected to take precedence over our own.

Until now.

As we face emergency PPE shortages, we are extending the use of one N95 mask from a minimum of 12 to over 36 hours. This is a mask that was designed for single use and to realistically only be worn for at most an hour or two. We don't have access to full body suits necessary to protect our face, neck, and clothing. Instead we utilize single use gowns, which only protect our arms and front portion of our torso. We are providing our own safety glasses because shields used to protect our entire faces are often hard to come by and are in questionable condition, being reused between multiple staff and patients. Cleaning supplies and disinfectant wipes are also in short supply, we are advised to think carefully about what we clean and to judiciously use disinfectants.

Nurses are accepted to be the professional experts on a holistic view of patient's lived experience while in the hospital. We know first hand how the quality of patient care has been reduced in efforts to preserve PPE and cleaning supplies. Many of our patients at Denver Health are gravely ill and often have medical histories with multiple pre-existing conditions due to income and systemic health disparities.

Simply put, our patient's are sicker than those at other hospitals, they have fewer resources, lower health literacy rates, and diminished coping skills. Their care is complex and more involved than patients at other facilities.

We can confidently inform this council that supplies and money for training are desperately needed to maintain the health of the most vulnerable members of our community. As the frontline nurses, we are committed to this mission - but we need Denver Health to have the support and the leadership it needs. We can't do it alone. Thank you so much for your time, consideration and commitment to the public of Denver County.